

# Field Naturalists Club of Ballarat

FEBRUARY 1988

## EXCURSION - NEWS SHEET

Meeting : February 5 Beetles - P. Kelly

Meeting : March 4 Annual Meeting.

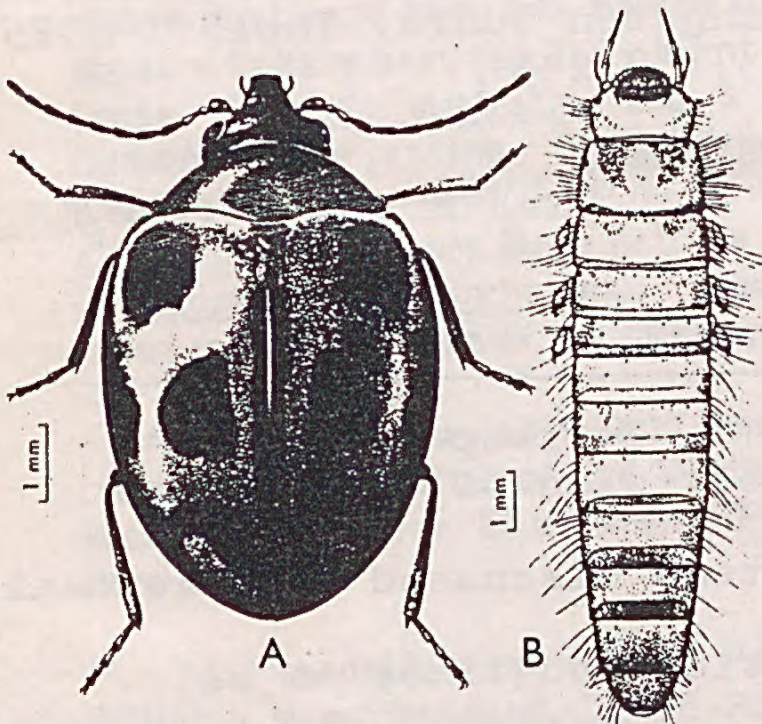
Excursion : February 6 Pictures from Mt Cole-B. Miller  
Wombat Forest area -P. Kelly

Excursion : March 6 Saturday, meet at Civic Hall.

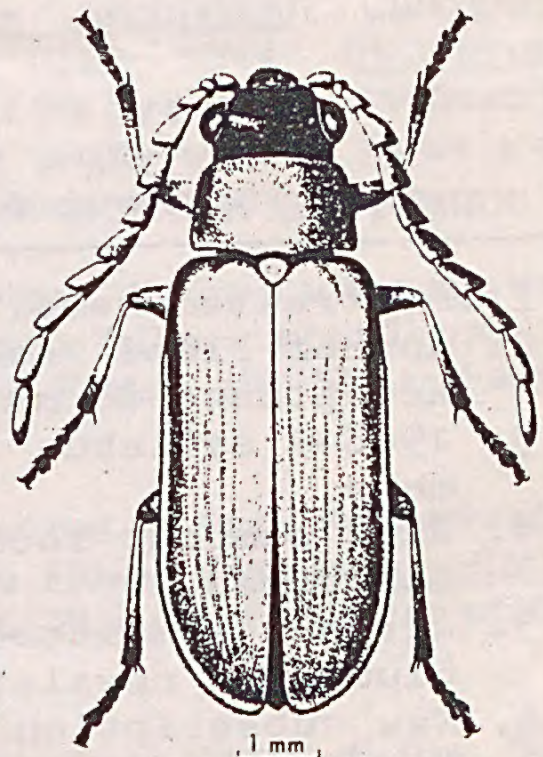
Mt Cole area

Full day excursion.

*Notodascillus sublineatus*, Dascillidae.  
[F. Nanninga]



A, *Macrohelodes crassus*, Helodidae, head hidden from above in life; B, helodid larva.  
[F. Nanninga]



"Insects of Australia".

President :	Miss H BURGESS	312210
Secretary :	Mr B DOWLING	432425
Treasurer :	Mr W WHITESIDE	413544
Editors :	Mr G BINNS	332282
	Mr L FINK	052 861319

Meetings as specified are held at the School of Mines and Industries, Lydiard Street Sth., Art Building, commencing at 7.30 p.m.  
EXCURSIONS, AS SPECIFIED, COMMENCE FROM CROCKERS, cnr. STURT AND ARM-STRONG STS., BALLARAT, at 9.30 a.m. for FULL DAY OUTINGS OR AT 1.30 p.m. for HALF DAY\*



## FOR YOUR DIARY

- Committee Meeting - February 17th at Meredith Post Office. Meet at 12 Pleasant St Sth at 7.30pm.
- March 6 - Excursion is full day event.
- March 12-14 - Annual Labour Day weekend gathering of VFNCA. "Kangarooobie", Princetown. Details available from Secretary Bary.
- March 18-20 - WVFNCA Autumn 'Camp Out' at Warrnambool. Excursions include Port Fairy, Tower Hill, Ralph Illidge Sanctuary. Accom<sup>m</sup>odation by personal arrangement. Details avail. from Sec. Bary.
- ? ? ? Club Camp Out; When and Where?  
Suggestions are required from members!
- August 27- 14 Days, Birdsville and Cooper Creek Safari. Kingston Tours. Tariff: \$525  
Phone (053) 581214 .

## COMMITTEE MEETING REPORT

- Items treated were:
1. Correspondence.
  2. Anchor Plant Project plan of work and acceptance forms.
  3. 1988-9 syllabus items discussed and proposals made.
  4. Club campout location and time; to be discussed.
  5. Agreed, committee report summary to be included in newsletter.
  6. New subscription rates proposed.
  7. Need for typist assistance; to be discussed.
  8. Club sponsorship of WVFNC meeting no. 2, 1988; to be discussed.



## ROKEWOOD EXCURSION    Sunday 6th December 1987

Twenty people toured south to Rokewood on a cool overcast afternoon. Pat Murphy had prepared a comprehensive plant list and lead us to small, interesting areas of natural vegetation.

Rokewood dam, the old township water supply, is surrounded by River Red Gum (Eucalyptus camaldulensis), Lightwood Wattle (Acacia implexa) and Black She-oak (Casuarina littoralis). The bordering pine plantation provided shelter for a group of Common Brown Butterflies. A Willie Wagtail was sitting on the fence and Welcome Swallows were feeding on insects over the dam. The pink flowers of Bindweed (Convolvus erubescens) blended with the delicate blue of Bluebells (Wahlenbergia sp.).

The native grassland of the Rokewood cemetery block and adjoining roadside provided a glimpse of what the Western district plains must have been like before European settlement. The area appears to have been regularly burnt but was covered with Kangaroo Grass (Themeda australis) and a variety of daisies including Common Everlasting (Helichrysum apiculatum), Clustered Everlasting (H. semipapozum) and Hoary Sunray (Helipterum albicans). There were large patches of the rare Button Wrinklewort (Rutidosis leptorrhynchoides). Many people were on hands and knees inspecting some of the smaller plants with hand lenses.

Afternoon tea was enjoyed in Rokewood. Native plants along the creek were the habitat of Red Wattlebird, Yellow-rumped Thornbill, Kookaburra, Superb Blue Wren, Grey Fantail and White-plumed Honeyeater.

At a roadside stop west of Rokewood we found Featherheads (Ptilotus macrocephalus), Curved Rice Flower (Pimelae curviflora) and Blue Grass Lilly (Caesia vittata). Blue Grass Lilly has edible tubers.

The last stop was a reserve, previously an old railway line. The trees in this area included She-oak, Red Gum and Silver Banksia (Banksia marginata). There were few herbs flowering due to sheep grazing which will also prevent regeneration of the trees.

J. Gregurke.



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## ABORIGINAL PLANT FOOD - A talk by Dr Beth Gott.

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When the first people came to Australia they found a vastly different land to the one they had left, and it is vastly/n<sup>ow</sup> to when they arrived around 40,000 years ago.

The animals were totally strange to them and a lack of fruit and nuts meant a new way of life. Over the years certain plants have been used for food. These plants were discussed at the December meeting, particularly those found around Ballarat.

They named these plants and many of them today are known by their Aboriginal names; in this paper they are all named by their common vernacular.

The early authors did not name their source of information nor all the Aboriginal names.

There are other categories, some because they are edible and others because they may have been used. With this in mind Scott has listed 700 Victorian plants that were used by the Aboriginals for food and for other uses. Of these food plants the most important are:-

### 1. Water related plants.

Cumbungi or bull rushes (TYPHA) Reed Mace. The central part of the rhizome tasting like potato is used, containing much starch which was chewed out of the fibre. The fibre was then washed and made into nets to catch fish and ducks. It was the staff of life to the Murray Darling river natives.

Water Ribbons, a common plant, growing in slow moving streams, dams, shallow lakes and billabongs.

This is used all over Australia; the potato like tubers were the food.

The Marsh Club Rush grows from tubers which, whilst young and quite hard, were cooked and pounded then made into cakes and cooked again (related to chinese water chestnuts). In water it grows very quickly and is closely allied to the seed rush that is found in salty areas, again starch was the food.



## 2 Dry Land Roots

The Lily family is possibly the most important of these as they all have roots the Aboriginal People used.

Early Nancy. Small bulb like roots (starchy).

Pale Vanilla Lily. Long spindle shaped tubers, with an enormous number of tubers (sweet and sugary).

Bulbine Lily. Has a bulb like base.

Milkmaids. Tuberous root (starchy).

Chocolate Lily. Small rounded tubers.

Twining Fringe Lily. Small translucent tubers in clusters.

These would be cooked in an earth oven- a pit about half a metre deep in which a fire is lit and using either stones or clay. The stones or clay were removed, the ashes swept out and the oven lined with grass. Small roots were put into baskets then heated retainers were put on top of the grass, covered up, and left. When opened the food is nicely cooked. Meat was also cooked in this way.

Orchids. All have tubers which were eaten. Green-hoods in thick clustered patches, like the Nodding Greenhood, were dug up. This digging acting as a thinning out process.

Bracken. The underground rhizomes were used as they are full of sticky starch. The Bracken was cooked and either the fibre was broken up or the starch was pressed out and made into cakes.

Particularly used by the Tasmanian Aborigines and also in New Zealand by the Maoris. Other ferns were also used for food.

Native Geraniums were another source of starch. The roots were quite woody and also high in tannin. They were pounded and probably treated like bracken.

Small-leaf Clematis . Also has woody, starchy roots, The smaller mallee type was also peppery.

Grass-tree. Soft tubers, they were seasonal sweet soft roots. In winter they apparantly serve as a water storage.

Myrnong, Yam Daisy. This was one of the most important food sources. They have a small white tuber which renews every year before flowering.

The plant is milky and when cooked is very sweet.

It was common in Victoria, North of Daylesford.



The plains were quite yellow with the flowers. The plant has very attractive leaves. Sheep were known to eat the leaves and even pull up the plants, making it very scarce. There are two forms, some have perennial roots. Up on the high plains there is a difference again. The leaves also were probably eaten. This plant will form new tubers if the top is replanted.

### 3 Fruits

Mistletoe. Sweet sticky fruit.

Common Apple Berry. Seeds

Carpobrotum or Pigface. Very nice fruit.

Prickly currant Bush. Pleasant sweet fruit.

Ruby Saltbush. Grows flat on the ground but the fruit is tasty.

Cherry Ballart. Has curious fruit, the stalk is eaten.

Native Raspberry or Bramble. Sweet tasty fruit.

Yellow Elderberry. Found in sheltered areas around creeks.

Kangaroo Apple. The ripe fruit, orange or semi-transparent. There are others that were never eaten unless very ripe.

Seeds were not eaten very much in Victoria, however Native Flax seeds were eaten.

### 4 Greens

Pigface. Young leaves.

Yellow Marsh Cress. A very nice tasting plant.

Common Sow Thistle. The leaves and inside of the stalk were eaten.

Grasstree. The young leaves are sweet and nutty.

Treefern. The soft top part of the stem. The smooth and also the rough treefern were eaten in Tasmania, but it is a food of necessity!

Banksia cones. Soaked in water to make a sweet drink.

Heath Honeypots

Manna. Manna is a sweet substance that oozes out of the leaves after insect attacks.

Wattlegum was eaten in large amounts (silver, black and golden). Trees were deliberately scratched or notched.

In most hunter-gatherer people about 50% to 70% of their food comes from these sources. L.F.



## ANCHOR PLANT PROJECT REPORT

Acceptance forms have been returned to the Australian Bicentennial Authority together with the proposed work plan.

Summer activity involves collection of seed, under permit, and arrangements for planting. The plants have been very healthy with this season and have fruited abundantly. Seed already collected appears to be of a high quality.

Autumn will bring in the more substantial activities of propagation of cuttings, site treatment, fencing etc; so any members willing to be involved will be welcomed. Speak to sub-committee members Pat Murphy, Helen Burgess, or Greg Binns!

## NEWSLETTERS

In May 1974, during the Presidency of Harvey Hooper, Roger Thomas edited No. 1 Newsletter of the Field Naturalists Club of Ballarat. Since then Edith Fry, Bette Gray, Jack Netherway, Pat Murphy, and Greg Binns and Lyndsay Fink have edited the Newsletter. Our thanks to these editors, the typists and members who have contributed articles to give an informed publication. Apart from there being no issues for February and July 1976 this Newsletter is No. 150. Please keep the articles coming!



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## BOTANY NOTES.

Many roadsides, fields and lawns seem to be almost a sea of yellow flowers !

A member of the daisy family ? Yes !

This family was called " Compositae " because the small florets were arranged in a composite head. Now the family is called Asteraceae.

It is the family with greatest number of species ( 1100 genera and 25,000 spp. -- 200 genera are native to Australia and many species have been introduced.)

The species that is flowering almost everywhere at present is Hypochoeris radicata ( Catsear )

Taxonomists often divide families with many genera into tribes. Willis places Hypochoeris in Tribe Cichorieae. Cooke ( Black's Flora of S. Aus. ) places it in Group A.

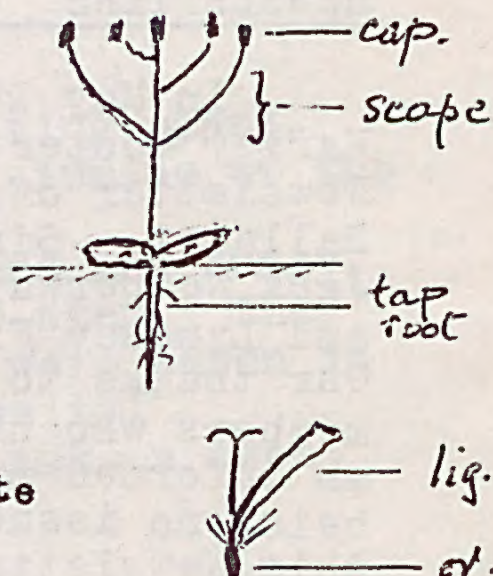
The main features of Hypochoeris radicata are :-

It is a perennial with a tap root

Leaves form a basal rosette and have a rough surface

The flower head ( capitulum ) is borne on a leafless, smooth, hollow stem ( = scape ) - these are often branched and said to be corymbose.

All the floret ( florets ) are ligulate and the petals are bright yellow.



H.H.

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